UNUSUAL HUMPBACK WHALE SIGHTINGS AT CAPE MORETON. *Memoirs of the Queensland Museum 35(1): 224. 1994*:- The waters adjacent to Cape Moreton (27°02'S, 153°28'E) in southern Queensland are in the migration route of Area V (130°E–170°W) humpback whales (Paterson,1991). The sightings reported here occurred during the 1993 northern migration.

On 4 July 1993 during the night of full moon RAP saw migrating humpback whales having been alerted by presumed 'social' sound.

A camp had been established on the SE aspect of Cape Moreton 65m above sea level, 100m back from the shore. A 15m walk was required to view the sea. At 1935h when atmospheric and sea conditions were perfect a 'subdued foghorn' sound was heard. The sea was scanned within a few seconds. No ships were present but blows typical of a humpback whale pair were seen close inshore approximately 150m ENE, north of the moonlit area of sea. The whales blew twice again before passing out of sight in a northerly direction. Within minutes another pair of blows was seen approximately 800m ESE. The whales were south of the moonlit area, did not surface as they traversed it, but were seen north of it 5 minutes later. In each case the transit time was consistent with that of similarly positioned humpback whales seen there during daylight.

Humpback whale population estimates in east Australia in the post-whaling period have been based on observations from elevated shore positions (Bryden et al., 1990; Paterson & Paterson, 1989) and those authors assumed that migration rates are similar during day and night. This fortuitous sighting, although of limited duration, supports that assumption.

It is likely that the alerting sound was produced by one of the inshore pair. Humpback whales produce complex underwater sounds or songs (Payne & McVay, 1971). The sound reported above is not included in those underwater sounds described by Cato (1991) for the east Australian stock but may have been a 'social' sound (D.H. Cato, pers. comm.). On 4 September 1992 numerous 'social' sounds were heard by RAP when watching four humpback whales <400m from the headland at Point Lookout (27°26'S, 153°33'E) between 0715 and 0730h. The group was southbound and moving slowly while remaining at the surface. Atmospheric and sea state conditions were favourable and the sounds were similar to those made by lowing cattle. On 12 October 1980 one of a group of three southbound humpback whales <100m from the same headland raised its head from the sea on a number of occasions and made a barking noise. Cato (1991) refers to that sound as a 'yap' and notes that it occurs when singing whales surface to breathe.

On 27 July 1993 MRK witnessed probable humpback whale parturition during a whale watch cruise.

The captain of the 'Tangalooma Flyer' had been informed by the lighthouse keeper at Cape Moreton at 1145h that a solitary humpback whale was stationary at the surface 2km WSW of the Cape. Viewing conditions were perfect and the whale was readily located 15 minutes later. It remained stationary for a further 30 minutes before rising horizontally as if being inflated. Approximately 1/3 of its body was above the water and its head and flukes were visible. It then 'subsided' and soon after a small grey coloured calf approximately 3–4m long appeared at its side close to the pectoral region. The pair then slowly moved away and were not followed.

Paterson & Paterson (1989) reported three accounts of probable humpback whale parturition witnessed by others in Great Barrier Reef waters between lat. 18–20°S in the months of August and September. Simmons & Marsh (1986) consider that the central section of the Great Barrier Reef is an important breeding ground for the east Australian stock. However, occasional parturition occurs at latitudes higher than Cape Moreton as northbound mothers and calves have been seen in that region (Paterson & Paterson, 1989) and Paterson et al. (1993) reported the stranding of a recently born calf on Moreton Island on 19 July 1991. The events described above are not conclusive proof of parturition and absolute proof is usually lacking in such reports of free-ranging cetaceans. However, the observation of a solitary animal, stationary for a considerable period, with the subsequent sudden appearance of a small lightly pigmented calf supports the possibility of parturition.

Literature Cited

Bryden, M.M., Kirkwood, G.P. & Slade, R.W. 1990. Humpback whales Area V. An increase in numbers off Australia's east coast. Pp. 271-277. In Kerry, K.R. & Hempel, G. (eds), 'Antarctic Ecosystems. Ecological change and conservation'. (Springer-Verlag: Berlin & Heidelberg).

Cato, D.H. 1991. Songs of humpback whales: the Australian perspective. Memoirs of the Queensland Museum 30(2): 277-290.

Paterson, R.A. 1991. The migration of humpback whales *Megaptera novaeangliae* in east Australian waters. Memoirs of the Queensland Museum 29(2): 333-341.

Paterson, R. & Paterson, P. 1989. The status of the recovering stock of humpback whales *Megaptera novaeangliae* in east Australian waters. Biological Conservation 47: 33-48.

Paterson, R.A., Quayle, C.J. & Van Dyck, S.M. 1993. A humpback whale calf and two subadult dense-beaked whales recently stranded in southern Queensland. Memoirs of the Queensland Museum 33(1): 291-297.

Payne, R.S. & McVay, S. 1971. Songs of humpback whales. Science 173: 585-597.

Simmons, M.L. & Marsh, H. 1986. Sightings of humpback whales in Great Barrier Reef waters. Scientific Reports of the Whales Research Institute, Tokyo 37: 31-46.

R.A. Paterson, Queensland Museum, PO Box 3300, South Brisbane, Queensland 4101, Australia; M.R. Keeley, Tangalooma Moreton Island Resort, PO Box 1102, Eagle Farm, Queensland 4009, Australia (present address 20 Murphy's Creek Road, Mt Kynoch, Queensland 4350, Australia); 15 October 1993.